

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. When strikethrough cannot easily be perceived, or when five or fewer characters are deleted, ~~[[double brackets]]~~ are used to show the deletion. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method utilized by a system including a group ~~plurality~~ of user terminals and a computer connected to the group of user terminals via a network, the information-distribution method including:

~~a designation-accepting step of accepting, from any of the user terminals, being a designator, designation of at least any one other user terminal among the user terminals, by the computer;~~

~~a storing step of storing, by the computer, a buddy list in which at least one designator-user-identifier identifying any a user terminal that is a designator in said designation-accepting step is correlated with a designee-user at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal designated in said designation-accepting step accepting designation;~~

~~an information-accepting step of accepting, by the computer, from a first source user terminal being a distributor among the user terminals, a distribution content to be distributed;~~

~~a distribution-condition-accepting step of accepting, by the computer, from the distributor-user terminal and a distribution condition according to which the distribution content accepted in said information-accepting step is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;~~

~~a distributee-candidate-determining step of determining, by the computer, one or more distributee-candidate primary destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the distributee-candidate primary destination user terminals being at least one selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition, from second user terminals among the designee-user terminals stored, in said storing step, correlatively with the designator-user identifier identifying the distributor-user terminal;~~

~~a first distribution step of transmitting, by the computer, the distribution content accepted in said information-accepting step to the one or more distributee-candidate primary destination user terminals;~~

~~a second distribution step of transmitting the distribution content, by the until the stop condition is satisfied, for any recipient user terminal having that has received the distribution content, determining, by the computer, one or more destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the destination user terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition, to some or all of one or more third user terminals that are registered in the buddy list of the distributee-candidate terminals; and~~
~~a distribution-catenating step of sending the distribution content one after another to the third user terminal that the user terminal that received the distribution content designates by repeating said second distribution step,~~
~~wherein said distribution-condition-accepting step includes receiving a and transmitting the distribution content from the recipient user terminal to the one or more destination terminalstep condition for stopping said distribution-catenating step, and stopping repeating the second distribution step when the stop condition is satisfied.~~

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein ~~said distribution-condition-accepting step includes receiving from the first~~
distribution condition sent by the source user terminal to the computer includes an identifier
~~selection of the at least one distributee-candidate of a primary user terminal.~~

3. (CANCELLED).

4. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further comprising:

recording stop-condition candidates that are alternatives for the stop distribution condition; and

~~accepting a selection of selecting~~ at least one of the stop-condition candidates as the stop distribution condition by the first source user terminal.

5. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a maximum count of user-terminals that distribute the distribution content.

6. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a depth-level restriction indicating path length between the first-source user terminal and user terminals to which the distribution content is distributed.

7. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, further including:

receiving, from reporter-user terminals among the user terminals, status reports on user terminals; and

storing statuses of the user terminals as reported correlatively with user identifiers identifying the reporter-user terminals, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a restriction of user terminals distributing the distribution content according to the corresponding status.

8. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include an expiration date for distributing the distribution content.

9. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein the distribution content contains a request of a user operating the first-source user terminal, and the stop distribution condition includes a fulfillment condition that serves as a judgment criterion for judging whether or not the request has been met.

10. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 9, ~~wherein said distribution condition accepting step further includes comprising:~~
storing fulfillment-condition candidates that are alternatives for the fulfillment conditions;
and

accepting a selection of at least one of the fulfillment-condition candidates.

11. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein:
the distribution content contains a request by ~~the~~a user operating the ~~first~~source user terminal; and
~~the distribution condition said distribution-condition-accepting step includes accepting a~~
fulfillment condition that serves as a judgment criterion for judging whether or not the request has been met, and
~~accepting a response to,~~ if the fulfillment condition has been met, user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the ~~first~~source user terminal receive a response to the request.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, wherein ~~said distribution-condition-accepting step further includes comprising:~~
storing response candidates that are alternatives for the ~~responses~~ response; and
~~accepting selection of~~ selecting at least one of the response candidates.

13. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, wherein ~~said distribution-condition-accepting step further includes comprising:~~
storing response candidates that are alternatives for the ~~responses~~ response, and
~~accepting selection of~~ selecting at least one of the response candidates; wherein the response candidates include a response reporting, to user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the ~~first~~source user terminal, that the fulfillment condition has been satisfied.

14. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, wherein ~~said distribution-condition-accepting step further includes comprising:~~
storing response candidates that are alternatives for the ~~responses~~ response, and
~~accepting selection of~~ selecting at least one of the response candidates; wherein the response candidates include a response reporting to the ~~first~~source user terminal user identifiers identifying user terminals that have contributed to satisfying the fulfillment condition.

15. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, ~~wherein said distribution condition accepting step further includes~~ including:
storing response candidates that are alternatives for the ~~responses~~ response, and
~~accepting selection of~~ selecting at least one of the response candidates; wherein the response candidates include a response reporting, to user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the first source user terminal, ~~the distribution content that~~
the fulfillment condition for which has been satisfied.

16. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, further including:

~~a response receiving step of receiving a response from a user terminal to which the distribution content has been distributed;~~

~~a judgment step of judging, based on the~~ received ~~response received in said response-receiving step,~~ whether or not the fulfillment condition has been satisfied; and

~~a response execution step, if the fulfillment condition has been satisfied, of executing the response, received in said response-receiving step, to the user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the~~ first source ~~user terminal.~~

17. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

~~a receiving conditions step of receiving, from setter-user terminals among the user terminals, settings as to receiving conditions that serve as criteria for judging whether or not to receive the distribution content transmitted through said first distribution step or said second distribution step;~~

~~a receiving conditions storing step of storing the receiving conditions correlatively with user identifiers identifying the setter-user terminals;~~

~~a reception satisfying step of judging, prior to executing said first distribution step or said second distribution step~~ transmitting the distribution content, whether or not the receiving conditions ~~per the distributee candidate terminals or the third user terminals are satisfied~~ for a user terminal to selected to receive the distribution content; and

~~a transmission-regulating step of, in accordance with the judgment results from said reception-satisfying step, executing or terminating execution of said first distribution step or said second distribution step transmitting the distribution content if the receiving conditions are satisfied according to the judging.~~

18. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

~~a forwarding-conditions step of receiving, from setter-user terminals among the user terminals, settings as to forwarding conditions that serve as criteria for judging whether or not to transmit to some or all of the third-destination user terminals the distribution content transmitted through said second distribution step;~~

~~a forwarding-conditions storing step of storing the forwarding conditions correlatively with user identifiers identifying the setter-user terminals;~~

~~a forwarding-satisfying step of judging, prior to executing said second distribution step, whether or not the forwarding conditions are satisfied per for the a destination user terminals terminal to which the distribution content has been distributed are satisfied; and~~

~~a forwarding-regulating step of, in accordance with the judgment results from said forwarding-satisfying step, executing or terminating execution of said second distribution step ending distribution for the destination terminal for which the forwarding conditions are not satisfied according to the judging.~~

19. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, ~~wherein in said second distribution step a judgment is made as to further comprising:~~

~~judging whether or not the third-destination user terminals include any user terminals to which the distribution content has already been transmitted, and so that the distribution content is transmitted to some or all of only to the third-destination user terminals apart from any user terminals to which the distribution content has not already been transmitted.~~

20. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

~~an incentive-storing step of storing incentive criteria for determining incentives offered to user terminals having received and/or transmitted the distribution content; and~~

~~an incentive-offering step of offering, to the user terminals having received and/or transmitted the distribution content, incentives in accordance with the incentive criteria.~~

21. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, ~~wherein:~~ further comprising:

~~said storing step includes, when storing the user identifier identifying the designator user terminal, correlatively with the at least one designee user identifier, grouping the designee at least one other user identifiers in the buddy list, if more than one, and storing them group-by-group correlatively with group names; wherein said distribution-condition-accepting step accepts, as a the distribution condition, includes identicalness or similarity between associations of the group names; and~~

~~said distributee-candidate-determining step includes judging whether or not a group name stored correlatively with a first-order-source user identifier is identical with or similar to a group name designated by the distribution condition, and determining a user terminal stored correlatively with a group name judged to be an identical or similar user terminal to be a candidate-destination terminal to which the distribution content is distributed.~~

22. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution device connected to user terminals via a network, the information-distribution device comprising:

~~a designation-accepting means for accepting from any of the user terminals, being a designator, designation of at least any one other user terminal among the user terminals;~~

~~a storing means for storing a buddy list in which at least one designator-user identifier identifying any a user terminal that is a designator by said designation-accepting means is correlated with a designee-user at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal designated whose designation has been accepted by said designation-accepting means;~~

~~an information-accepting means for accepting, from a first-source user terminal being a distributor among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed;~~

~~a distribution-condition-accepting means for accepting from the distributor-user-source terminal a distribution condition according to which the distribution content accepted by said information-accepting means is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;~~

~~a-distributee-candidate-determining means for determining one or more distributee-candidate primary destination terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the distributee-candidate primary destination terminals being at least one selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition, from second user terminals among the designee user terminals stored, by said storing means, correlatively with the designator user identifier identifying the distributor user terminal;~~

~~a-first distribution means for transmitting the distribution content accepted by said information-accepting means to the one or more distributee-candidate primary destination terminals;~~

~~a-second distribution means for transmitting the distribution content, from any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent, to some or all of one or more third destination user terminals that are registered selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the buddy list of the distributee-candidate terminals, in accordance with the distribution condition; and~~

~~a-distribution-catenating means for iteratively activating said second distribution means, wherein said distribution-condition-accepting means receive a until the stop condition for stopping said distribution-catenating means is satisfied.~~

23. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a information-distribution program utilized by a computer connected to user terminals via a network, the computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a information-distribution program for executing:

~~a-designation-accepting-step-of-accepting, from any of the user terminals, being a designator, designation of at least any one other user terminal among the user terminals;~~

~~a-storing-step-of-storing a buddy list in which at least one designator-user identifier identifying any a user terminal that is a designator in said designation-accepting-step is correlated with a designee-user at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal designated in said designation-accepting-step accepting designation;~~

~~an information-accepting-step-of-accepting, from a first source user terminal being a distributor among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed;~~

~~a distribution-condition-accepting step of accepting from the distributor user terminal and~~
a distribution condition according to which the distribution content ~~accepted in said information-~~
~~accepting step~~ is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;

~~a distributee-candidate-determining step of determining one or more distributee-~~
~~candidate-primary destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed,~~
~~the distributee-candidate-primary destination user terminals being at least one selected, in~~
~~accordance with the distribution condition, from second-user terminals whose identifiers are~~
~~correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with~~
~~the distribution condition among the designee-user terminals stored, in said storing step,~~
~~correlatively with the designator-user identifier identifying the distributor-user terminal;~~

~~a first distribution step of transmitting the distribution content accepted in said~~
~~information-accepting step to the one or more distributee-candidate-primary destination user~~
~~terminals;~~

~~a second distribution step of transmitting the distribution content until the stop condition is~~
~~satisfied, from for any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent,~~
~~determining one or more destination user terminals to which the informational content will be~~
~~distributed, the destination user terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers~~
~~are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the buddy list, in~~
~~accordance with the distribution condition, and transmitting the informational content to some or~~
~~all of one or more third user terminals that are registered in the buddy list of the distributee-~~
~~candidate terminals; and~~

~~a distribution-catenating step of repeating said second distribution step, wherein said~~
~~distribution-condition-accepting step includes receiving a stop condition for stopping said~~
~~distribution-catenating step.~~

24. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer product utilized by a computer connected to user terminals via a network, the information-distribution product for making the computer function as:

~~a designation-accepting means for accepting from any of the user terminals, being a~~
~~designator, designation of at least any one other user terminal among the user terminals;~~

a-storing means for storing a buddy list in which at least one ~~designator-user-identifier~~ identifying any a user terminal that is a ~~designator~~ by said ~~designation-accepting~~ means is correlated with a ~~designee-user~~ at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal ~~designated~~ whose designation has been accepted by said designation-accepting means;

~~an~~-information-accepting means for accepting, from a ~~first-source~~ user terminal being a ~~distributor~~ among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed;

a-distribution-condition-accepting means for accepting from the ~~distributor-user~~ source terminal a distribution condition according to which the distribution content ~~accepted by said~~ information-accepting means is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;

a-distributee-candidate-determining means for determining one or more ~~distributee-~~ candidate-primary destination terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the ~~distributee-candidate-primary destination~~ terminals being at least one selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition, ~~from second user terminals among the designee-user terminals stored, by said storing means, correlatively with the designator-user identifier identifying the distributor-user terminal~~;

a-first distribution means for transmitting the distribution content ~~accepted by said~~ information-accepting means to the one or more ~~distributee-candidate-primary destination~~ terminals;

a-second distribution means for transmitting the distribution content, from any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent, to some or all of one or more third destination user terminals ~~that are registered~~ selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the buddy list of the distributee-candidate terminals, in accordance with the distribution condition; and

a-distribution-catenating means for iteratively activating said second distribution means, wherein said ~~distribution-condition-accepting means receive a~~ until the stop condition for stopping said distribution-catenating means is satisfied.

25. (WITHDRAWN). An information-distribution method utilized by an information-exchange server able to communicate with a plurality of user terminals via a network, the information distribution method:

accepting, user-by-user in advance, registration of other users whom a given desires will consult information, and storing, as information exchange relationship data, identifier information for the given user, correlatively with the other users of whom it is desired to consult information;

accepting, user-by-user, redistribution of first information pertaining to the given user, and, based on the information-exchange relationship data, reporting or disclosing the first information to users having an information-exchange relationship to the given user; and

accepting, user-by-user, registration of second information containing conditions, picking out, as starting point, users included in the distribution conditions who will be first distributes and, as distributes for the second information, users who, based on the information-exchange relationship data, fit the distribution conditions, and transmitting the second information to the users picked out.

26-28. (CANCELLED).

29. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method for a system including a computer and user terminals connected via a network, the information-distribution method including:

~~storing buddy lists in the computer, each buddy list corresponding to a terminal and including at least one other terminal identifier;~~

providing distribution content to be distributed and a stop distribution condition to the computer by a first-source user terminal among the user terminals;

determining one or more second-destination terminals to which the distribution content is distributed by the computer based on the a buddy list corresponding to the first-source terminal, transmitted by the source terminal with the distribution content;

first transmitting the distribution content from the computer to the one or more second-destination terminals;

iteratively, until the stop condition is met,

determining one or more destination terminals to which the distribution content to be distributed by the computer, based on buddy lists received from terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed, and

~~second transmitting distributing the distribution content from the computer to the one or more second user destination terminals, to corresponding one or more third user terminals that are registered in the buddy list of the respective one or more second terminals; and~~

~~distributing the distribution content one after another to user terminals on the buddy lists of terminals that have received the distribution content until the stop distribution condition is met wherein the destination terminals determine when the condition is met.~~

30. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method for a system including a computer and user terminals connected via a network, the information-distribution method including:

distributing a distribution content provided by a first user terminal to the computer, to one or more second user terminals identified on a buddy list as corresponding to the first user terminal; and

distributing the distribution content from user terminals that received the distribution content to ~~corresponding one or more user terminals~~ identified in ~~on~~ buddy lists of the respective user terminals until a stop distribution condition provided by the first terminal is met.